Zakaat al-Fitr

by:

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Praise Be To Allaah.

Definition

Zakaat al-Fitr is a kind of charity (sadaqah) that is obligatory at the time of breaking the fast of Ramadaan. The word zakaat is connected by idaafah (genitive structure in Arabic grammar) to fitr because the occasion of breaking the fast is the reason why this zakaat becomes obligatory.

Reasons for Zakaat Al-Fitr and What Islam says about it

Ibn ‘Abbaas said:

> **“The Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made zakaat al-fitr obligatory as a means of purifying the fasting person from idle talk and foul language, and to feed the poor. Whoever pays it before the prayer, it is an accepted zakaat, and whoever pays it after the prayer, it is just a kind of charity (sadaqah).”** (Reported by Abu Dawood, 1371

Al-Nawawi said: Abu Dawood reported it from Ibn ‘Abbaas with a hasan isnaad).

“Purifying” means purifying the soul of the one who has fasted Ramadaan. With regard to the word **“foul language”**, Ibn al-Atheer said:

“ **‘Foul language’** refers to obscene speech. **‘Feeding [the poor]’** refers to food that is edible. **‘Whoever pays it before the prayer’** means before Salaat al-‘Eid. **‘It is an accepted zakaat’** – here zakaat means sadaqat al-fitr. **‘Just a kind of charity’** means a kind of charity that could be given at any time.” (‘Awn al-Ma’bood Sharh Abi Dawood).

It was said that this is what was meant by the aayah in Soorat al-A’laa:

> **“But those will prosper who purify themselves,**
> **and glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord,**
> **and (lift their hearts) in Prayer.”**
>
> [al-A’laa 87:14-15 – Yusuf Ali’s translation]

It was reported that ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeez and Abu’l-‘Aaliyah said:

> **“He [the Prophet (ﷺ)] paid zakaat al-fitr then he went out for the prayer – i.e., Salaat al-‘Eid.** (Al-Jassaas, Ahkaam al-Qur’aan, part 3, Soorat al-A’laa)

Wakee’ ibn al-Jarraah said:

> “Zakaat al-fitr for the month of Ramadaan is like two sajdahs of sahw for the prayer. It makes up for any shortcomings in the fast as the prostrations make up for any shortcomings in the prayer.” (Al-Nawawi, al-Majmoo’, part 6).

Rulings on Zakaat Al-Fitr

The correct view is that it is fard (obligatory), because Ibn ‘Umar said:

> **“The Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made zakaat al-fitr obligatory,”**

…and because of the consensus of the scholars (ijmaa’) that it is fard. (Al-Mughni, part 2, Baab Sadaqat al-Fitr).

When it has to be Given

It becomes obligatory when the sun sets on the last day of Ramadaan. Anyone who gets married, has a baby born to him or becomes Muslim before the sun sets on that day, has to give zakaat al-fitr [on behalf of himself and/or his new wife or new baby], but if that happens after sunset, he does not have to give it… Whoever dies after sunset on the night of fitr, sadaqat al-fitr must be given on his behalf. This is what Ahmad stated." (Al-Mughni, part 2, Fasl Waqt Wujoob Zakaat al-Fitr)

Who is Obliged to pay it?

1. Zakaat al-fitr is obligatory on Muslims. Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) said:

   “The Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made zakaat al-fitr, one saa’ of dates or one saa’ of barley, obligatory on the Muslims, slave and free, male and female, young and old.” (Al-Bukhaari, 1407)

2. Al Shaafa'i (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

   “The hadeeth of Naafi’ indicates that the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made it obligatory only on the Muslims, which is in accordance with the Book of Allaah, may He be glorified, because He has made zakaat as a purification for the Muslims, and purification can only be for the Muslims.” (Al-Umm, part 2, Baab Zakaat al-Fitr)

3. It is obligatory on those who are able to pay it. Al-Shaafa'i said:

   “Everyone who, at the beginning of Shawwaal, has enough food for himself and those whom he is supporting, for that day, and has enough to give zakaat al-fitr on behalf of them and himself, should give it on behalf of them and himself. If he only has enough to give on behalf of some of them, then he should give on behalf of some of them. If he only has enough for himself and those whom he is supporting, then he is not obliged to give zakaat al-fitr on his own behalf or on behalf of those whom he is supporting.” (Al-Umm, part 2, Baab Zakaat al-Fitr)

4. Al Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “The one who is in financial difficulty is not obliged to give [zakaat al-fitr]; there is no difference among the scholars in this regard… The obligation is determined by whether or not a person can afford it. Whoever has one saa’ more than he needs for himself and those whom he is obliged to support on the

night and day of Eid, has enough [is not in financial difficulty]. Whoever does not have anything more than he needs is in financial difficulty, so he is not obliged to pay anything in this case. (Al-Majmoo’, part 6, Shuroot Wujoob Sadaqat al-Fitr).

5. The Muslim should give on his own behalf and on behalf of those on whom he spends, such as wives and relatives, if they cannot give it on their own behalf. If they are able to, it is better for them to give it themselves, because the command is addressed to them in the first place.

Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه) said:

> **“The Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made zakaat al-fitr, one saa’ of dates or one saa’ of barley, obligatory on the Muslims, slave and free, male and female, young and old, and commanded that it should be given before the people went out to pray.” (Al-Bukhaari, 1407)**

Al-Shaafa'i (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> “The guardian of the insane and the minor should give zakaat al-fitr on their behalf and on behalf of those for whom they [the insane and minor] may be responsible, just as the sane person should give on his own behalf… If there is a kaafir among those whom he is supporting, he does not have to give zakaat al-fitr on his behalf, because he cannot be purified by zakaah.” (Al-Umm, part 2, Baab Zakaat al-Fitr).

The author of al-Muhadhdhab said:

> “The author (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: ‘If someone has to pay zakaat al-fitr on his own behalf and on behalf of those whom he is supporting, if they are Muslim and if has more than he needs to spend on them that he can give, then the mother and father, and grandparents and great-grandparents, etc., may have to pay zakaat al-fitr on

> behalf of their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, etc., and the children may have to pay zakaat al-fitr on behalf of their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, etc., – if they are obliged to spend on their maintenance.' " (Al-Majmoo', part 6)

A man has to pay on behalf of himself and his wife – even if she has money of her own – and his children and parents if they are poor, and his daughter if she is married but the marriage has not yet been consummated. If his son is rich, he does not have to give zakaat al-fitr on his behalf. A husband has to give zakaat al-fitr on behalf of a divorced wife whose divorce (talaaq) is not yet final (i.e., she is still in the 'iddah of a first or second talaaq), but not in the case of a rebellious wife or one whose divorce is final. A son does not have to give zakaat al-fitr on behalf of a poor father's wife because he is not obliged to spend on her.

[When giving zakaat al-fitr], one should start with the closest people first, so he gives it on behalf of himself, then his wife, then his children, then the rest of his relatives in order of closeness, following the pattern laid out in the rules governing inheritance.

Al-Shaafa'i, may Allaah have mercy on him, said:

> "Who I say is obliged to give zakaat al-fitr, if a child is born to him, or he takes possession of a slave, or someone becomes one of his dependents, at any time during the last day of Ramadaan, then the suns sets on the night of the crescent of Shawwaal, he has to give zakaat al-fitr on that person's behalf." (Al-Umm, Baab Zakaat al-Fitr al-Thaani).

It is not obligatory to give zakaat al-fitr on behalf of a fetus that is still in the mother's womb, but if this is done voluntarily, there is nothing wrong with it.

If someone who is obliged to give zakaat al-fitr dies before giving it, it must be given from his estate… even if the person who was supporting him also dies, the obligation still stands. (Al-Mughni, part 2).

If a servant has set wages that are paid to him daily or monthly, the employer does not have to give zakaat al-fitr on his behalf, because he is a hired worker, and one is not obliged to spend on a hired worker. (al-Mawsoo'ah, 23/339).

Concerning giving zakaat al-fitr on behalf of an orphan, Imaam Maalik (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "The guardian should give zakaat al-fitr on behalf of the orphans some of whose wealth is under his control, even if they are minors." (Al-Mudawwanah, part 1).

Amount of Zakaat Al-Fitr

The amount to be given is one saa' of food, according to the measure of saa' used by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), because of the following hadeeth.

> **Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (ﷺ) said: "At the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) we used to give it in the form of a saa' of food…"** (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 1412)

The weight of the saa' [which is a measure of volume] varies according to the type of food concerned, so when giving zakaat al-fitr by weight, one must make sure that what is given is equivalent to a saa' of that type of food. A saa' is approximately equivalent to three kilograms of rice.

Types of Things that my be Given

What should be given is food for human consumption, such as dates, wheat, rice or other kinds of food that humans eat. It is reported in al-Saheehayn from Ibn 'Umar (ﷺ) that the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) made zakaat al-fitr, one saa' of dates or one saa' of barley, obligatory on the Muslims, slave and free, male and female,. (At that time, barley was one of the foods they ate). (Al-Bukhaari, 1408)

> **Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (ﷺ) said: "At the time of the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ), we used to give a saa' of food on the day of Fitr." Abu Sa'eed said: "And our food was barley, raisins, aqit (dried yoghurt) and dates." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 1408).**

It should be given in the form of the staple food that is used locally, whether it is wheat, rice, dates or lentils…

Al-Shaafa'i (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> "If the staple food of a people is corn, pearl millet (dukhn), thin-husked barley (sult), rice or any grain on which zakaat is obligatory, then they may give it as zakaat al-fitr." (Al-Shaafa'i, al-Umm, part 2, Baab al-Rajul yakhtalifu qootuhu)

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> "Our companions said: 'It is a condition of giving something as zakaat al-fitr that it should be one of the foodstuffs on which zakaat is paid at the rate of one-tenth (i.e., zakaah of grains and fruits). Nothing else is acceptable except aqit (dried yoghurt), cheese and milk.'"

Al-Maawardi said:

> "This is the case even though some of the people who live on islands and others have fish or eggs as their staple food; these are not acceptable (as zakaat al-fitr) and there is no difference (among the scholars concerning this). As regards meat, the correct view is that stated by al-Shaafa'i and confirmed by al-Musannif and the companions in all that was narrated from them: that it is not acceptable (as zakaat al-fitr), and this is the unanimous view (of the scholars)… Our companions said: 'This is the case even if their staple food is fruits on which they do not have to give one-tenth as zakaat, such as figs etc. These are not acceptable (as zakaat al-fitr) at all." (Al-Majmoo', part 6: al-Waajib fi Zakaat al-Fitr)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> "If it was said, 'You must give a saa' of dates everywhere, whether it is the staple food or not,' this is a disputed matter which is subject to ijtihaad. There are some people who say that it is obligatory, and others who say that in each country it is obligatory to give a saa' of whatever is the staple food there, as the Prophet (ﷺ) specified five types of food for zakaat al-fitr, so in each country they can give the equivalent of a saa' of their staple food. This is more correct, and is closer to the principles of sharee'ah, for how can you make it obligatory for people whose staple food is fish, for example, or rice or pearl millet, to give dates? … And Allaah is the Source of strength. (I'laam al-Muwaqqa'een, part 2, al-Qiyaas)

It is permissible to give pasta ("macaroni") that is made from wheat, but one must make certain that the weight is equivalent to the weight of a saa' of wheat.

As for giving zakaat al-fitr in the form of money, this is not permissible at all, because the Prophet (ﷺ) said that it must be given in the form of food, not money. He clearly stated that it

is to be given in the form of food, so it is not permissible to give it in any other form and Islam wants it to be given openly, not secretly. The Sahaabah gave zakaat al-fitr in the form of food, and we should follow, not innovate. The giving of zakaat al-fitr in the form of food is regulated by the measure of saa’, and if it were to be given in the form of money, it could not be regulated in this manner: according to the price of what would it be worked out and given? There are obvious benefits to giving it in the form of staple foods, such as at times when businessmen are hoarding certain goods, prices have gone up, or at times of war and inflation. If someone were to say, “But money is more useful for the poor, because then they can buy what they want, and they might need something other than food, so the poor person might sell the food and lose money.” The response to this is that there are other sources for meeting the needs of the poor with regard to shelter, clothing and so on, which are provided for from the zakaat paid on people’s wealth (zakaat al-maal), general charity and other kinds of donations. Let us put things into the proper Islamic perspective and adhere to what was set out by the Prophet (ﷺ), who told us that giving a saa’ of food to feed the poor is obligatory. If we give food to a poor person, he will eat it and will benefit from it sooner or later, because it is the kind of food he uses anyway.

On this basis, it is not permissible, for the purposes of zakaat al-fitr, to give money for a person to pay off his debts or to cover the cost of surgery for a sick person or to pay for tuition for a needy student and so on. There are other sources for this kind of help, as stated above.

The Time for giving Zakaat Al-Fitr

It should be given before the Eid prayer, as is stated in the hadeeth that the Prophet (ﷺ),

> **"Commanded that it should be given before the people went out to pray."** (Al-Bukhaari, 1407)

There is a time when it is mustahabb (preferable) to give it and a time when it is permissible to give it.

The time when it is mustahabb to give it is on the day of Eid, because of the hadeeth quoted above. For this reason it is Sunnah to delay the Eid prayer on Eid al-Fitr so as to allow enough time for those who have to give zakaat al-fitr to do so, and to have breakfast before coming out. On the other hand, it is Sunnah to hasten the Eid prayers on Eid al-Adhaa so that the people can go and offer their sacrifices and eat from them.

The time when it is permissible to give zakaat al-fitr is one or two days before Eid. In Saheeh al-Bukhaari it is reported that Naafi' said:

> "Ibn 'Umar used to give on behalf of the young and the old, and he even used to give on behalf of my sons. He would give to those who took it, and it would be given a day or two before (Eid) al-Fitr."

("Those who took it" refers to those who were appointed by the imaam to collect the sadaqat al-fitr).

Naafi' said:

> "Ibn 'Umar used to send zakaat al-fitr to the one who was collecting it two or three days before ('Eid) al-Fitr." (al-Mudawwanah, part 1, Baab Ta'jeel al-Zakaah qabla huloolihaa)

It is disliked (makrooh) to delay giving it until after Salaat al-'Eid; some scholars said that this is haraam and is counted as qadaa' (making up a duty that has not been performed on time), on the basis of the hadeeth,

> **"Whoever pays it before the prayer, it is an accepted zakaat, and whoever pays it after the prayer, it is just a kind of charity."** (Reported by Abu Dawood, 1371)

It says in 'Awn al-Ma'bood Sharh Abi Dawood:

> "Obviously, the one who gives zakaat al-fitr after the prayer is like one who did not give it, because they have in common the fact that they did not give this obligatory charity. Most of the scholars think that giving it before Salaat al-'Eid is only mustahabb, and they confirmed that it is OK to give it at any time until the end of the day of Fitr, but this opinion is refuted by the hadeeth. With regard to delaying it until after the day of Eid, Ibn Ruslaan said: "This is haraam by consensus, because it is zakaah, so the one who delays it must be committing a sin, as is the case when one delays a prayer."

So it is haraam to delay giving it for no good reason, because this defeats the purpose, which is to save the poor from having to ask on the day of joy. If a person delays giving it with no excuse, he has committed a sin but he still has to make it up.

Zakaat al-fitr has to be handed over to someone who is entitled to it or someone who has been appointed to collect it, at the right time before the Eid prayer. If a man wants to give it to a particular person, but cannot find him or a trustee who can accept it on his behalf, and he is afraid that time is running out, he has to give it to another entitled person, and not delay giving it. If a person wants to give his zakaat al-fitr to a specific needy person, and is afraid that he may not see him at the appropriate

time, he should tell him to appoint someone to accept it on his behalf, or to appoint him (the giver) to take it from himself on his behalf. Then when the time comes, he can take it to him in a bag or whatever, or keep it for him as a trust until he sees him.

If the one who wants to give zakaat appoints someone else to give it on his behalf, he is still responsible for it until he is certain that his deputy has carried out his instructions. (Majaalis Shahr Ramadaan: Ahkaam Zakaat al-Fitr, by Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen).

To Whom it may be Given

Zakaat al-Fitr may be given to the eight categories of people to whom zakaat al-maal may be given. This is the opinion of the majority. According to the Maalikis, one of the opinions of Ahmad and the opinion of Ibn Taymiyyah, it should be given exclusively to the poor and needy.

1. (Al-Shaafa'i said):

> “Zakaat al-fitr should be divided among those among whom zakaat al-maal is divided, and it should not be spent anywhere else… It should be shared out among the poor and needy, slaves who have made a contract to purchase their freedom from their masters, debtors, those who are fighting in the way of Allaah, and wayfarers. (Kitaab al-Umm: Baab Day’ah Zakaat al-Fitr qabla Qasmihaa)

2. Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said, after quoting the hadeeth of Ibn ‘Abbaas (ﷸ) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Mu’aadh (ﷸ):

> **“Tell them that they have to give sadaqah (charity) that is to be taken from their wealth and given to the poor.”**

> “It is not permissible to give any part of zakaah to a kaafir, whether it is zakaat al-fitr or zakaat al-maal… Maalik, al-Layth, Ahmad and Abu Thawr said: ‘They (i.e., kaafirs) should not be given it.’”

Zakaah should be given to the poor, those who have overwhelming debts, and those whose salaries are not enough to last until the end of the month, in accordance with the level of their needs.

It is not permissible for the one who gives zakaat al-fitr to buy it back from the one to whom he has given it. (Fataawaa al-Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen).

Payment and Distribution

1. It is preferable for the person who is giving to share it out himself. (Al-Shaafa'i said): “I prefer to share out zakaat al-fitr myself rather than give it to the one who is collecting it.”

2. Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “Al-Shaafa'i said in al-Mukhtasar:

> ‘Zakaat al-fitr is to be shared out among those to whom zakaat al-maal is shared out. I prefer that it should be given to relatives on whom it is not obligatory to spend at all.’ He said: ‘If he prefers to give it to the one who is collecting it, this should be fine, in sha Allaah… but it is better to share it out himself… If he gives it to the Muslim leader or the collector or the one who is collecting the people’s zakaat al-fitr, and he is given permission to give it, this is fine, but sharing it out himself is better than all of this.’” (al-Majmoo’, part 6).

3. It is permissible to appoint a trustworthy person to hand it over to those who are entitled to it, but if he is not trustworthy, then it is not allowed. ‘Abd-Allaah ibn al-Mu’ammal said:

> “I heard Ibn Abi Mulaykah, when a man was saying to him, ‘So-and-so told me to leave my zakaat al-fitr in the mosque,’ Ibn Abi Mulaykah said, ‘He does not know what he is talking about. You go and share it out (yourself), otherwise Ibn Hishaam (the governor who was collecting it in the mosque) will give it to his guards and whoever he wants’ (i.e., he would give it to people who were not entitled to it).” (Al-Umm: Baab day’at Zakaat al-Fitr qabla Qasmihaa)

Imaam Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him) stated that it is permissible to share out one saa' among a group of people, or to give many saa's to one person…

Maalik said:

> "There is nothing wrong with a man giving sadaqat al-fitr on behalf of himself and his family to one needy person." (al-Mudawwanah, part 1, Baab fi Qasm Zakaat al-Fitr).

If one is giving less than a saa' to a poor person, this must be pointed out, because he might use it to pay his own zakaat al-fitr.

It is permissible for a poor person, if he receives zakaat al-fitrah from someone and he has more than he needs, to give it on his own behalf or on behalf of one of those who are dependent on him, if he is sure that the food is OK (i.e., it is the right type of food and the quantity is sufficient).

Where to give Zakaat al-Fitr

Ibn Qudaamah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> "As for zakaat al-fitr, it should be shared out in the country where it became obligatory, whether a person has wealth there or not, because it is the reason why zakaat became obligatory…" (al-Mughni, part 2, Fasl idhaa kaana al-muzakki fi balad wa maaluhu fi balad)

It was reported in al-Mudawwanah Fiqh al-Imaam Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him):

> "I said: What is the opinion of Maalik on someone who comes from Ifreeqiyah ('Africa') and is in Egypt on the day of Fitr – where should he give his zakaat al-fitr? Malik said: [He should give it] where he is. Maalik said: if his family in Ifreeqiyah give it on his behalf, that is fine. (What was meant by Ifreeqiyah/'Africa' in those days is different from what it means now)." (Part 1, Baab fi Ikhraaj al-Musaafir Zakaat al-Fitr)

We ask Allaah to accept the worship of all of us and to join us with the righteous. May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad and all his family and companions.

(*) Note: All verses are interpretations of the Meanings.